

ERIE-NIAGARA REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP

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MEMORANDUM

To: Co-Chairs Clyde Burmaster & Barry Weinstein, MD

From: Transportation Chair Peter Wendel

Re: June, October, & November 2006 Meetings

Date: December 8, 2006

The Erie-Niagara Regional Partnership Transportation Subcommittee met June 23, 2006 at the Erie County Industrial Development Agency (ECIDA), and October 19 and November 18, 2006 at the Niagara County Center for Economic Development (NCCED). Present for the June meeting were subcommittee members Wendel, Burmaster, Ferraro, and Morse. Present for the October meeting were subcommittee members Wendel, Burmaster, Ferraro, and Morse (proxy). Present for the November meeting were subcommittee members Burmaster, Ferraro, Gower, and Morse.

Direction of the Transportation Subcommittee:

The Subcommittee turned its attention to itself, discussing what the future of the subcommittee should be and what issues it should cover. Subcommittee Chair Wendel posed the question, "What is the role of our committee? Should we be initiating or monitoring?"

The discussion was prompted by stagnation of topics, limited subcommittee membership (six in all), and a lack of involvement from Erie County (both on the subcommittee and in general).

The Subcommittee agreed to suspend meetings over the summer and give some thought to these issues. The Sustainability Committee took up the issue at its June 29 meeting, and suggested several possible steps. Wendel then sent the following e-mail on September 15 to the Transportation Subcommittee:

"Dear ENRP Transportation Subcommittee Members;

Following our last meeting I've been in conversation with Sam Ferraro and Hal Morse. Based on those conversations, I am writing you to propose a new direction for the Transportation Subcommittee.

The ENRP Mission Statement reads: 'The Erie-Niagara Regional Partnership is a non-traditional regional collaborative forum for linking multiple organizations and initiatives, and also serves as a catalyst to identify and pursue opportunities to grow the region.'

There are many transportation oriented activities being carried out in the region. Some of the major initiatives that have been drawn to my attention include:

- A Niagara Frontier freight study
- Development of Niagara Falls International Airport
- Framework for Regional Growth
- Long Range Transportation Plan by GBNRTC
- NYS Master Transportation Plan

I'm sure there are others. Some are even bi-national in scope. And all will have an impact on our region – and on each other. What will their impact be? How will they interact with each other? How will they impact and intertwine with other issues that we are exploring in other committees? How can we capitalize on these opportunities and mitigate potential negative impacts?

I suggest that the ENRP needs to become aware of the various initiatives and, to quote the Mission: 'link multiple organizations and initiatives' and 'serve as a catalyst to identify and pursue opportunities to grow the region.'

And I suggest that this role can best be carried out by the Transportation Subcommittee. Therefore, I am proposing that we make this our new objective – to become informed about the focus and activities of the key transportation related initiatives, to keep the ENRP membership informed and, where appropriate, to help these agencies set priorities and discover ways to link their activities to create the greatest positive impact for the region.

How will we do this? By inviting representatives of the various agencies to present their work at our monthly meetings, comparing our findings and providing leadership to maximize the impact of their work on the region.

We can also invite other parties to become members of our committee.

I welcome your feedback on this proposal. I will schedule a committee meeting in October to explore this proposal and to decide our next steps.

I am mindful of the second issue that was raised at our last committee meeting: lack of involvement by key elements of Erie County Government. I have no answer to this. All I can hope for is that the ENRP addresses essential subjects in such a way that all aspects of Erie County government see our activities to be so important and impactful that they decide that they 'cannot not participate.'

I look forward to your response.

Pete Wendel, Chair"
ENRP Transportation Committee

The subcommittee took up the issue at the October meeting. Consensus was reached that the Transportation Subcommittee should focus on being informed, informing others, and initiating projects if needed. There are many transportation related issues and initiatives out there, and we will look to gather them up under one agenda and investigate them to make sure that they are not working at cross-purposes with each other – to ensure that we are speaking with one voice.

To accomplish this, the subcommittee will focus on one major issue per meeting, with time left for open discussion on emerging matters.

GBNRTC Freight Study:

The first topic the subcommittee focused on was the freight study being conducted by the Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council (GBNRTC). This project is in its beginning stages, with a consultant just having been selected. The Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (NFTA) will administrate the contract, and a steering committee has been established to guide the effort. Further, stakeholders will be gathered together to provide input as the effort moves forward. The study will take approximately one year to complete.

The focus of the study is to re-link transportation investments to economic development. There is an increase in freight traffic, and the question is how do we capture that to spur economic growth.

The overall objectives are to establish benchmark levels of demand and capacity, describe the relationship between the economy and the freight system, project freight levels through 2025, assess the local system's ability to accommodate growth, develop program and project proposals, and analyze public versus private benefits.

The key issues are reaffirming the importance of the freight transportation system to the national economy, addressing nationally and regionally significant highway bottlenecks and rail choke points, increasing investment in freight transportation – capital, labor, and operations, and reorganizing our institutional structure for planning and investment.

There are seven work tasks:

1. Establish a benchmark for existing freight demand, capacity, and operating characteristics.
2. Describe the existing economy of the Niagara Frontier Region and the relationship between the Niagara Frontier's freight transportation system and its economy, and analyze transportation's impact on economic growth.
3. Estimate the current level of cross-border trade between the Niagara Frontier and Canada for five-year increments through 2025. Examine the origin/destination, including transshipment points near border areas of cross border freight movement.
4. Determine projected freight levels in the Niagara Frontier Region for five-year increments through 2025.
5. Assess the local transportation system's ability to accommodate future freight growth.
6. Develop project or program proposals that address future freight transportation needs.
7. Provide an analysis of public vs. private benefits of the proposals and a sensitivity analysis of their impact on the future economy of the area.

The point was made that a bottleneck already exists due to limited border crossings, especially the fact that there is only one rail crossing. Attempts to increase air cargo at the Niagara Falls International Airport (NFIA) could be hampered if you can't then move the freight on land. Morse noted that the air cargo portion of the study will be accelerated based on the current work at the NFIA.

This study can fit into the Regional Economic Development Strategy (REDS) logistics cluster. As the study is just beginning there is an opportunity to fit the REDS' needs into it.

Finally, the importance of specific deliverables – both short and long term – was stressed, as was the need to make sure that appropriate county staff and elected officials are involved in and aware of the effort.

This item will be left as a standing item on the subcommittee agenda, and Morse will bring specific items to the group periodically.

Other Issues:

The other issue discussed was the current efforts to remove or move various toll booths in the region, and a New York State Thruway Authority study on tolls. The subcommittee will attempt to secure this study for discussion at the next meeting.